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ABSTRACT

Strategies for encouraging positive interaction among adults are suggested. The objective is to help teachers and other adults who work with children to interact in more meaningful ways with other adults including teachers, parents, school volunteers, classroom visitors, and community members. Strategies are presented in five topical areas: 1) introducing interaction techniques, 2) recognizing silent signals, 3) setting aside classroom time for interacting, 4) encouraging interaction among adults involved in educating young children, and 5) improving written communications between teachers and parents regarding children's progress in school. Illustrations for each topic are presented in the form of cartoons and/or graphics. Adults participating in the interaction activities are directed to analyze various types of interactions, suggest ways in which specific types of interactions could be made more positive, identify non-verbal messages conveyed in a variety of ways including posture and facial expression, develop planning schedules which allot varying amounts of time to interacting activities, explain to parents and volunteers what is expected of them as class helpers during a simulated parent-teacher interview, and write a variety of model letters to parents and other adults who might be encountered in an educational setting. (DB)

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ADULTS INTERACTING: AN OPEN FRAMEWORK APPROACH

SP 015 457

Underlying the open framework approach to program planning is an assumption that learning occurs when an individual and an environment interact. It has been said elsewhere that: 'The learner is not a passive recipient; he is an active agent . . . Physical and psycho-social environments exert pressures on this active agent . . . The learner acts and is acted upon; in other words, interaction takes place.'[1]

All aspects of the environment are important to the teacher using an open framework approach:

- *the way space is organised;*
- *the way time is organised;*
- *the materials and activities chosen by the teacher; and*
- *the interactions that take place.*

Children interact with space, time, materials and people. They interact not only with other children but also with adults. Adults interact with each other, too. In an open framework program, interactions between adults are significant, because many adults contribute in some way to the program.

Both the type and quality of interaction between adults involved in any aspect of the program will play a part in determining outcomes. Children who observe adults co-operating, for instance, will have a model to use for developing their ability to co-operate with others. In this paper, strategies for encouraging close co-operation between adults are introduced and discussed. They are among the strategies that have proved most successful for teachers working in Queensland schools.

Reference

1. Gail Halliwell, *An Interactional Model for Early Childhood Education*, Curriculum Branch, Department of Education, Qld, 1977.

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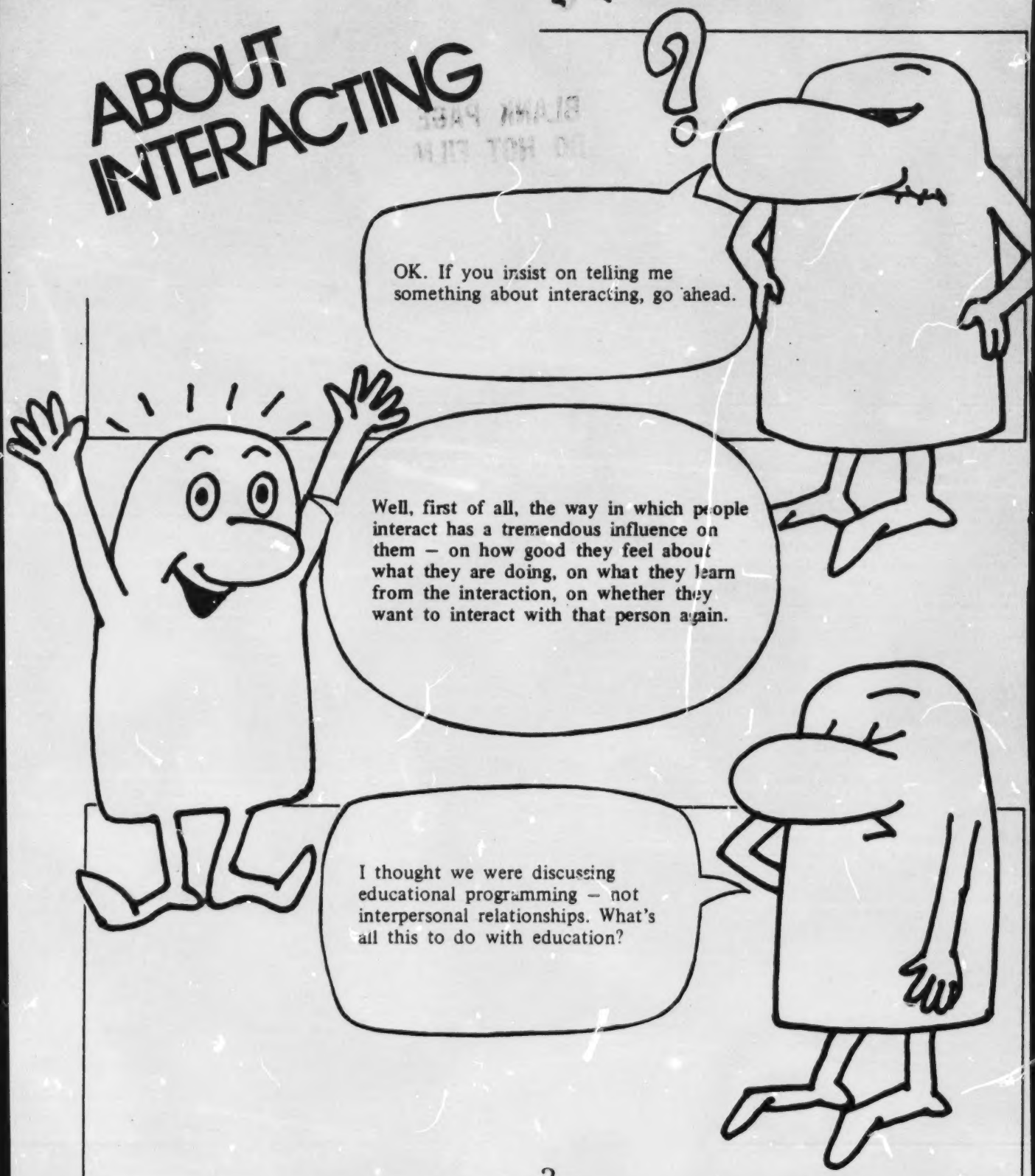
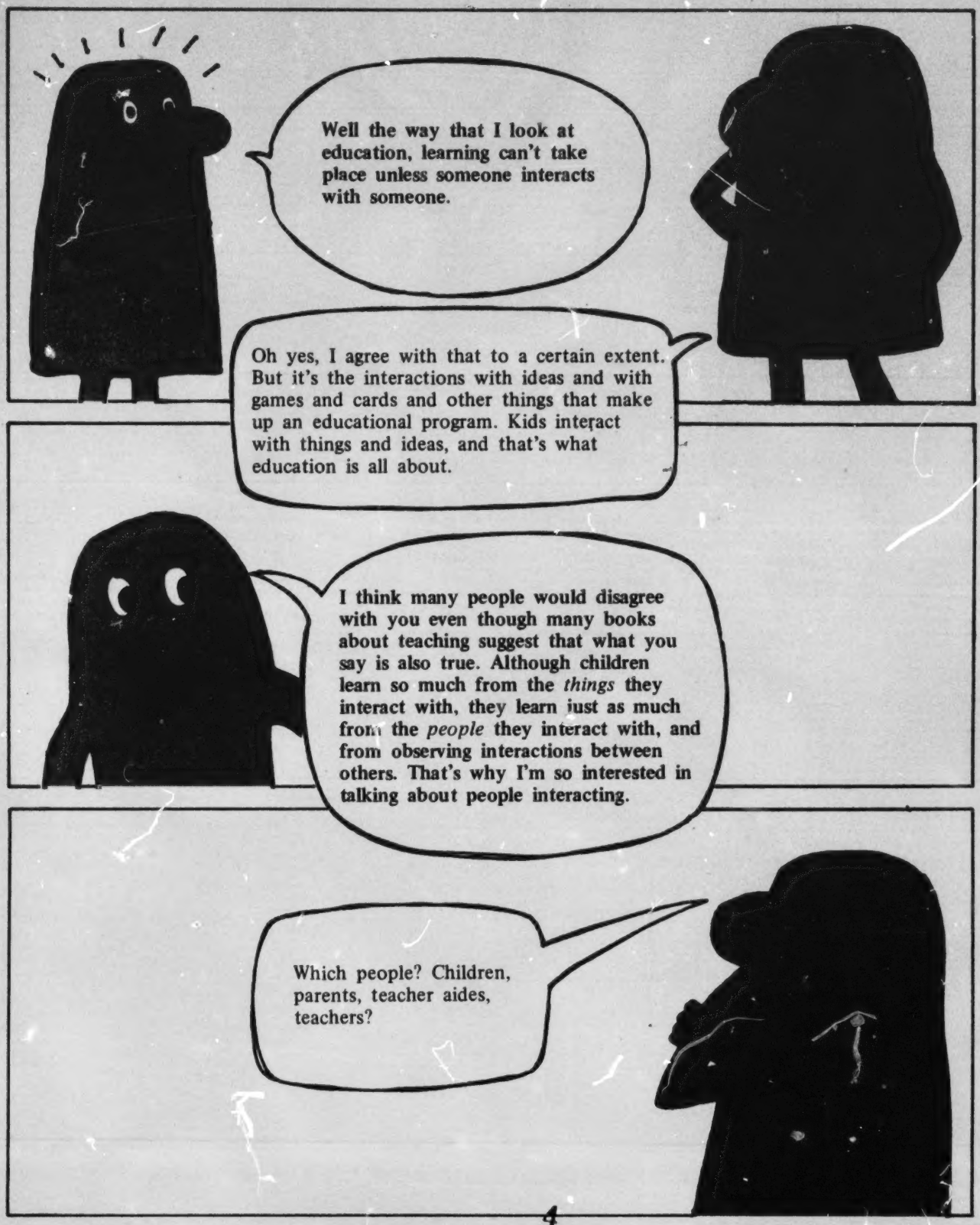
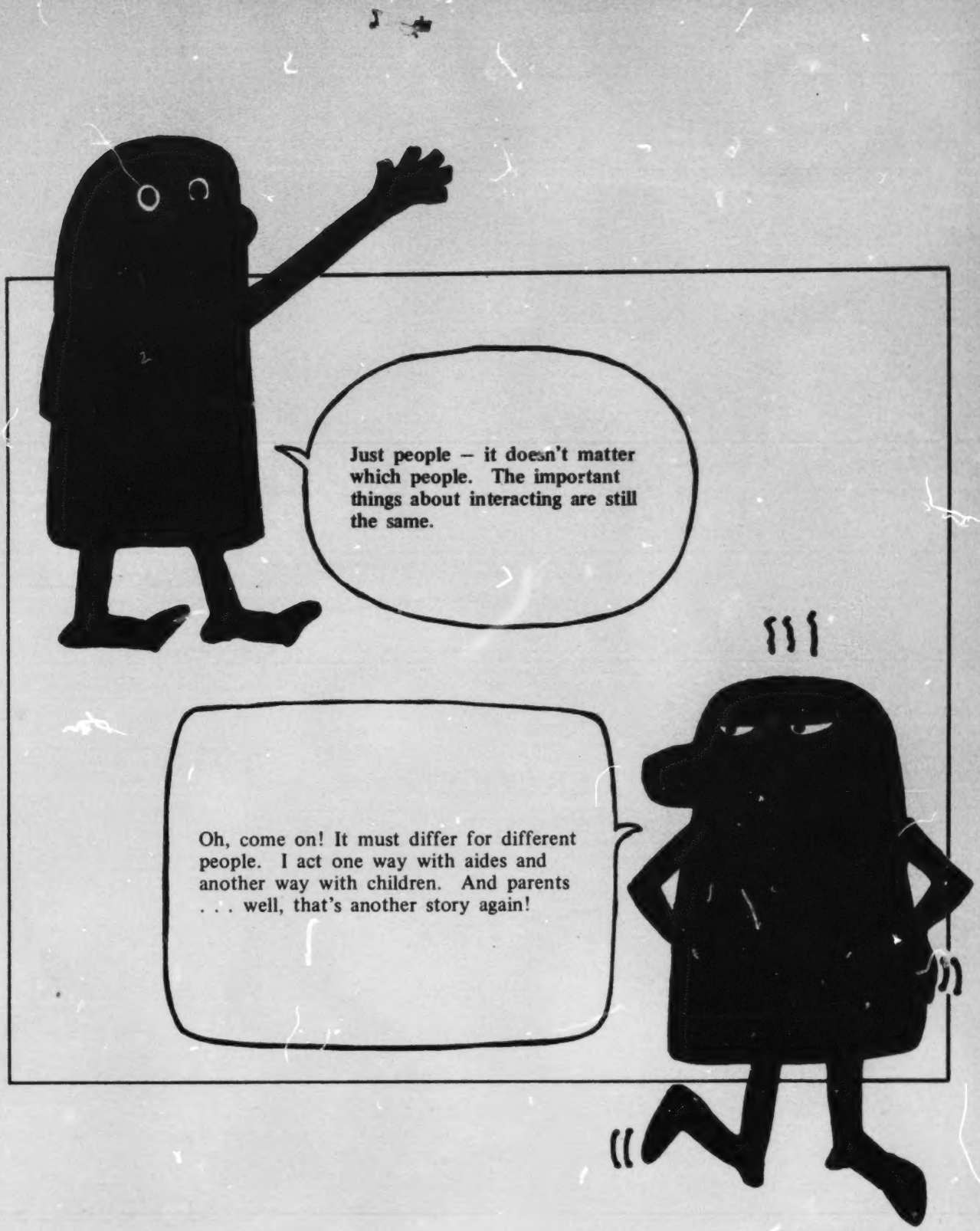
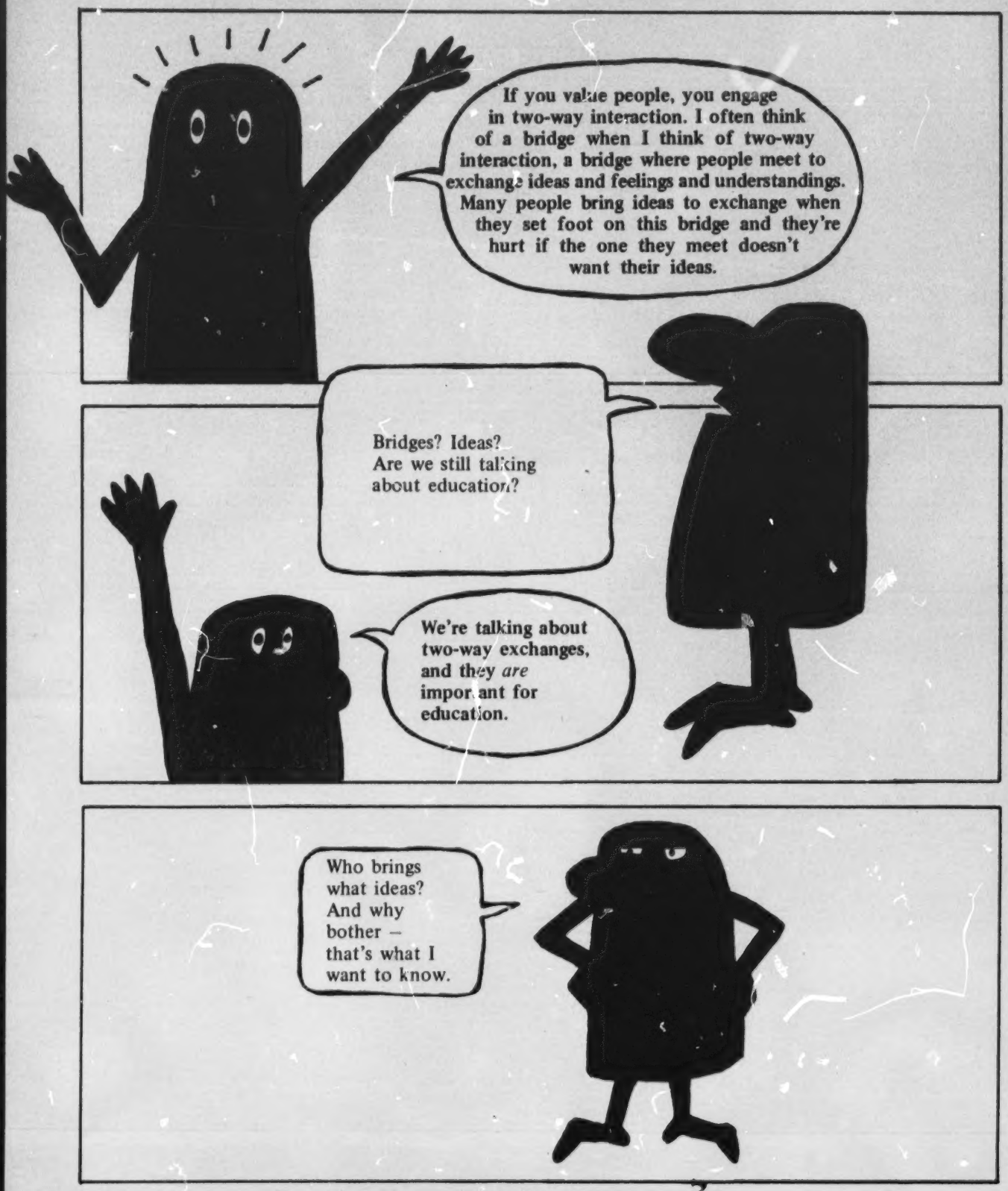
ABOUT INTERACTING


OK. If you insist on telling me something about interacting, go ahead.
Well, first of all, the way in which people interact has a tremendous influence on them – on how good they feel about what they are doing, on what they learn from the interaction, on whether they want to interact with that person again.
I thought we were discussing educational programming – not interpersonal relationships. What's all this to do with education?


Well the way that I look at education, learning can't take place unless someone interacts with someone.
Oh yes, I agree with that to a certain extent. But it's the interactions with ideas and with games and cards and other things that make up an educational program. Kids interact with things and ideas, and that's what education is all about.
I think many people would disagree with you even though many books about teaching suggest that what you say is also true. Although children learn so much from the *things* they interact with, they learn just as much from the *people* they interact with, and from observing interactions between others. That's why I'm so interested in talking about people interacting.
Which people? Children, parents, teacher aides, teachers?


Just people – it doesn't matter which people. The important things about interacting are still the same.
Oh, come on! It must differ for different people. I act one way with aides and another way with children. And parents . . . well, that's another story again!

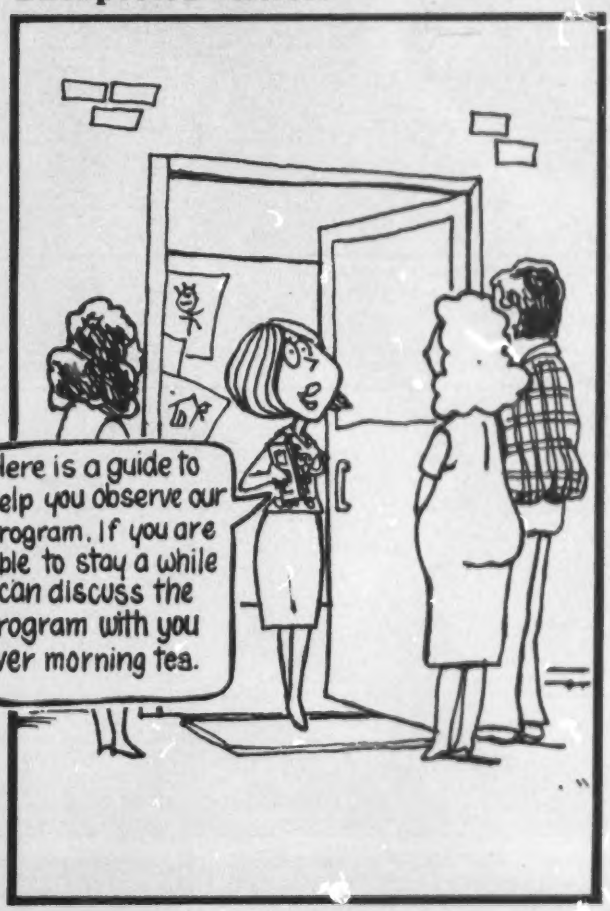
Interaction in education, the way you act with other people – all other people – reflects the values you hold and influences the quality of what is learned. Children learn by modelling themselves on what they see others doing, as well as by interacting among themselves. So if you think one form of interaction is better than another, that should be the dominant one in your program.
Do tell me more.
YAWN
Perhaps if I divide styles of interaction into two types, I'll get my point across to you. One-way interaction, where one person dominates and the other is submissive, is one style, and communication through a two-way process is another. Two-way interaction involves people treating one another as being equally important.


If you value people, you engage in two-way interaction. I often think of a bridge when I think of two-way interaction, a bridge where people meet to exchange ideas and feelings and understandings. Many people bring ideas to exchange when they set foot on this bridge and they're hurt if the one they meet doesn't want their ideas.
Bridges? Ideas? Are we still talking about education?
We're talking about two-way exchanges, and they *are* important for education.
Who brings what ideas? And why bother – that's what I want to know.

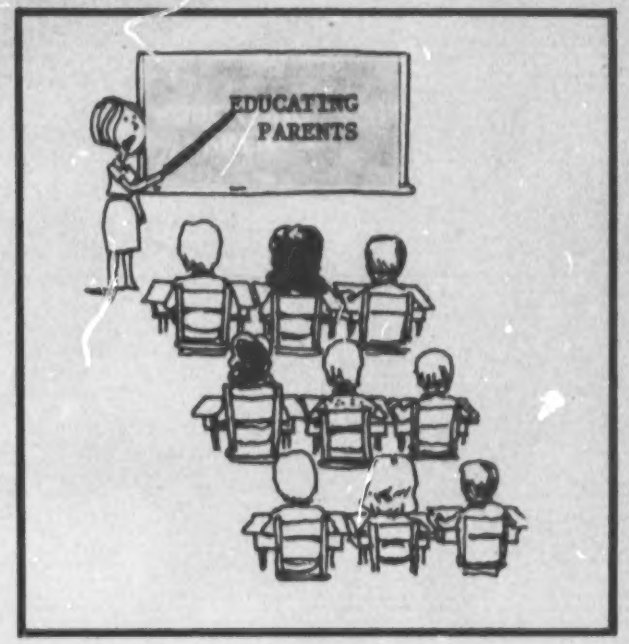
Who? Well, it might be parents or aides or children or another teacher or anyone else who tries to meet you on the bridge. And why bother? Well, if you are operating a program based on a philosophy that says the integrity of the individual must be respected, then two-way styles of interaction *must* be emphasised. If you don't care about individual integrity maybe there's no need to bother, though I suspect there are other spin-offs, like more interest in the task.
O.K., so you believe in two-way interaction. Just how do you get it?
That's what this booklet is about – interaction between adults. But, as I said before, it doesn't matter whether it's adults or children. The process is the same.
So you said. But I don't know yet whether I'm convinced.

Organising for two-way interaction includes giving consideration to the messages conveyed in the way you organise space for adults in interact. Here are examples of how to convey to visitors, aides and parents an impression that they are welcome, and that you would value communicating with them.

Unexpected visitors

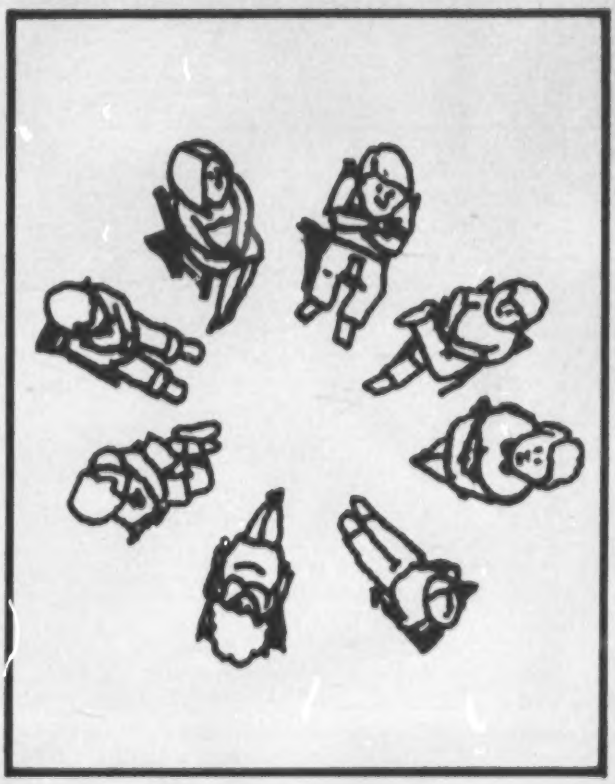

Here is a guide to help you observe our program. If you are able to stay a while I can discuss the program with you over morning tea.

Educating parents

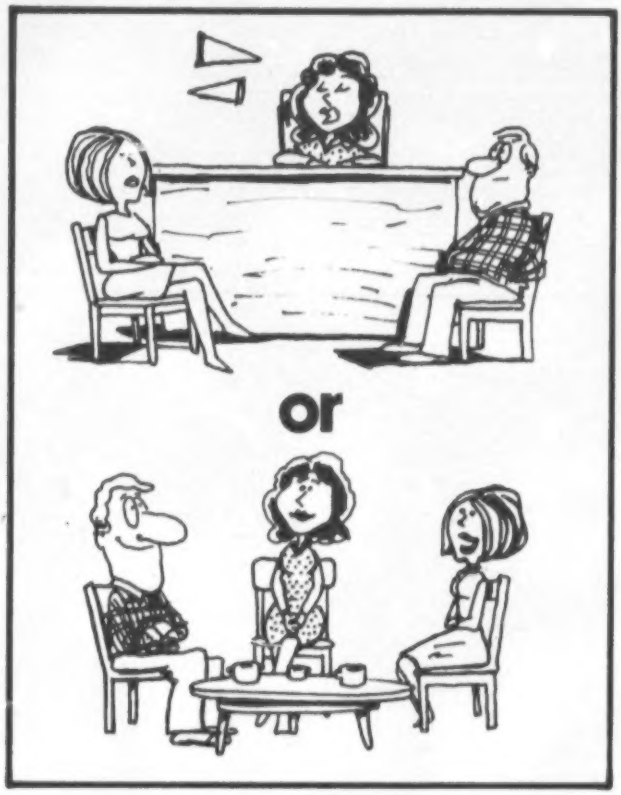


or

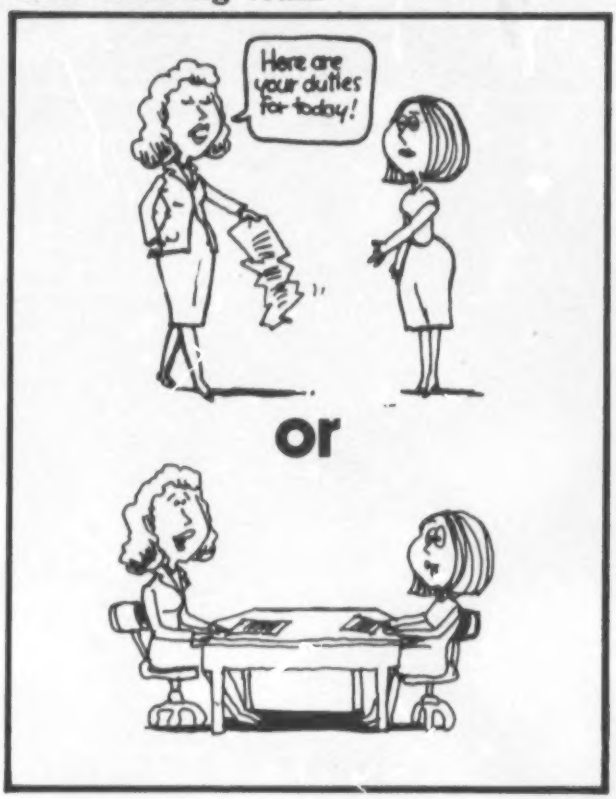
Exploring issues together



Interviews



The teaching team

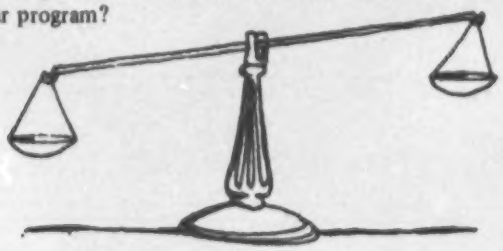


An open door

A welcoming smile

No conscientious teacher ever has enough time, so decisions have to be made about what the available school time is to be used for. Obviously, time spent with children will account for the major proportion. Daily planning and preparation, parent contact and professional development must share the remaining time.

How important is interaction with adults in your program?



Time for parents

Some schools have found time to foster and develop a close relationship between teachers and parents. At one primary school, for example, parents are encouraged to feel at home in the school. Teachers set aside time before school, between 8.30 a.m. and 9 a.m., for informal contact with parents. This is the time when parents voice their uncertainties and anxieties in an atmosphere free from the constraints of a formal interview. It is a time when parents can ask questions about school, and volunteer information about their children. These contacts take place in the classroom and can involve a group of parents, or just one or two. The keynote is informality. After school, time is reserved for formal consultations between parents and teachers. At these times, the teacher is able to devote all her attention to discussion with the parent. Not all parents are able to attend formal interviews during the day, so arrangements are made for the teacher and parent to meet in the evening when necessary.

Time for visitors

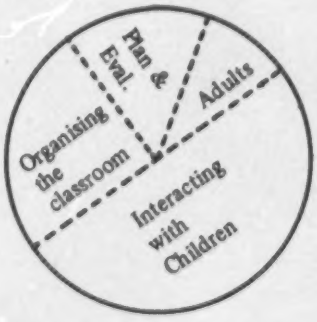
When it is difficult and inconvenient to interrupt the program to talk with visitors during the work period, provide them with a guide to observing the program. Make arrangements to discuss the program with them at a set time, for instance over morning tea, or when children are busy with tasks that require less interaction with the teacher.

Time for volunteers and aides

All adults involved in working in the program need time to discuss both long-term and short-term planning. Long-term planning may require a lengthy meeting, perhaps once a term. At these meetings details about program goals, organisation of the environment and ways to observe and interact with children can be discussed. Short-term planning and evaluation would need to be undertaken much more regularly, possibly weekly or daily.

Here are some ways in which primary and pre-school teachers have made time available for planning and evaluating the program:

- The last day of first and second terms have been used by one teacher to get together with volunteers and aides to discuss planning for the following term. Evaluative comments regarding the completed term are solicited.
- One pre-school teacher who has two part-time aides, one working with the morning group and the other with the afternoon group, arranges for them to overlap for fifteen minutes once a week. This allows time for short-term planning and evaluation.
- Where there is one full-time aide, many pre-school teachers find it convenient to set aside ten minutes each lunch hour to discuss the organisation of the environment and the interactions engaged in by individual children.
- Devoting one lunch hour a week to planning and evaluation works well for another teacher and her aide. This session takes place on Friday, when the program can be evaluated and new objectives planned for the following week. Observations about individual children's progress are shared, and the teacher puts this information, together with feedback from parents, into plans for the following week. This teacher has found that a daily planning session is too frequent, interrupted as it often is by telephone calls, administration and sales people. Posters and verbal messages ensure that the weekly session is subjected to fewer interruptions.
- The problem of discussing short-term planning with volunteers was overcome by one teacher when she arranged to devote ten minutes during the children's self choice activities to discussion with the volunteer in the room where the children were working.



Should some of *your* time be set aside for interacting with adults?

In this section the focus is on activities that teachers might use to plan for effective two-way interaction between adults involved in the education of young children.

Activities are discussed under the following headings:

Initial contacts
Initial interviews
Volunteers in the classroom
Excursions
Surveys
Home visits
Discussing children's progress
Group meetings

Initial contacts

The initial contact can often set the tone for the future relationship between parents and teacher. If parents feel unwanted at this stage they are likely to avoid future contact. If they are made to feel welcome they are more likely to visit the school again and to take an interest in school activities.

Here are some ways in which teachers in State pre-schools and primary schools have developed a welcoming atmosphere for parents.

'With the letter of acceptance and information booklet on how the pre-school or Year 1 class functions, I usually send each family a name tag for the child to wear on his first days at school. The tag is kept for excursions later in the year.'

In another pre-school, the teacher said, 'I usually make initial contact with the parents at the end of the year before their children are due to attend pre-school. I invite them up in small groups of five or six, with their children, to see the pre-school functioning. After a small tour around the pre-school and a chat over coffee about what is happening, I explain the sorts of things parents can expect to happen during the following year. I also have two charts available, one for parents to indicate whether they would like to belong to a car pool, and the second to indicate when they would like to have their initial interview at the beginning of the next year. In case they forget, or lose their booklet, a reminder notice of interview times for parents to refer to is displayed in the pre-school window during the Christmas holidays.'

Initial interviews

'I like discussing each question on the initial interview form with the parents and recording their comments verbatim.'

'It seems to work really well for me to have a general discussion about the children's likes and dislikes with a small group of parents. Then I take each parent individually to discuss the more personal information I need. Both children and parents get to know each other more readily this way and my aide has a chance to meet them as well.'

'I like to give parents and children refreshments and a name tag when they arrive for the initial interview, and I think it's very important to introduce the children to each other as well as the parents.'

'At the end of the year, we post out the initial interview form to each family and ask them to fill it in and bring it along to the interview on a designated date the next year. We feel that in this way both parents can discuss the questions at their leisure. When the parents come on interview day we can go through the form and discuss any special concerns.'

'After I've interviewed a small group of about six parents individually, I like to show a film about the kinds of activities they'll see at pre-school. The film seems to be a good way to open up communication between the parents and helps those who are still a little unsure to feel happier about sending their child to pre-school. I have found these films useful at initial interviews.'

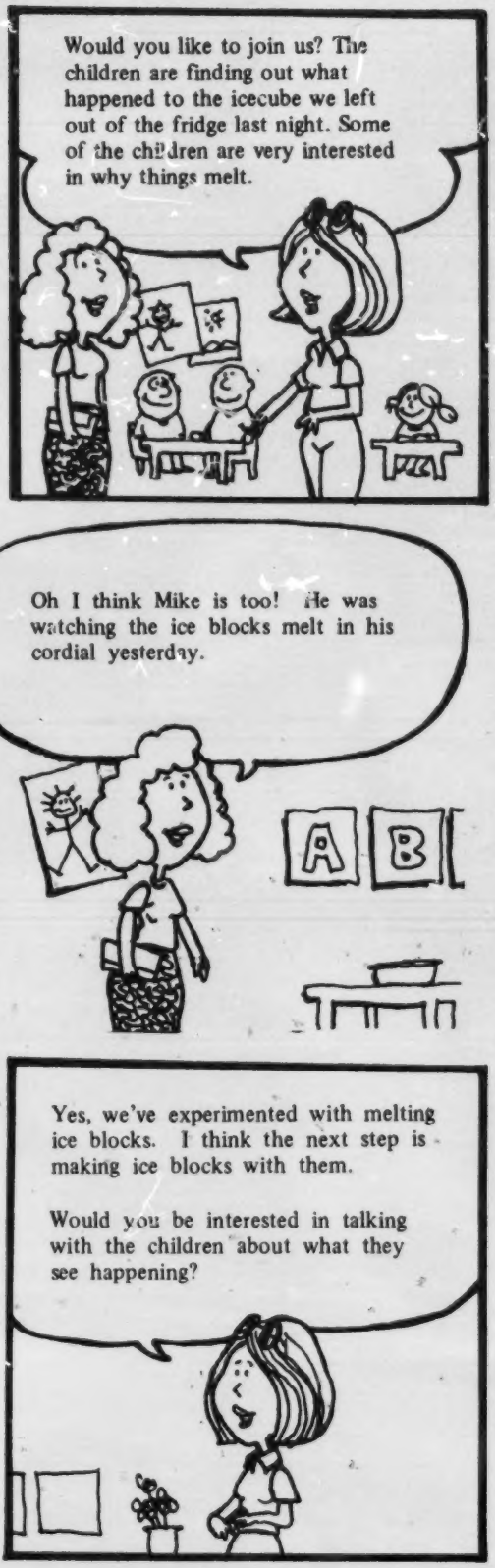
Volunteers in the classroom

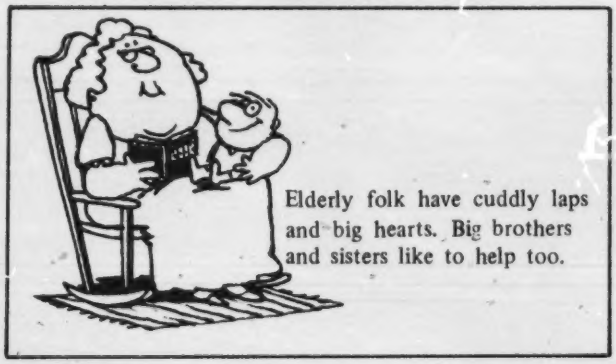
Having volunteers in the classroom can be unnerving unless you have taken the time to develop a program that shows why they are being involved, what forms of interaction are expected, and what resources are needed to help them take part in the program. Particular care should be taken in ensuring that the program has benefits for volunteers, the children, and the teacher.

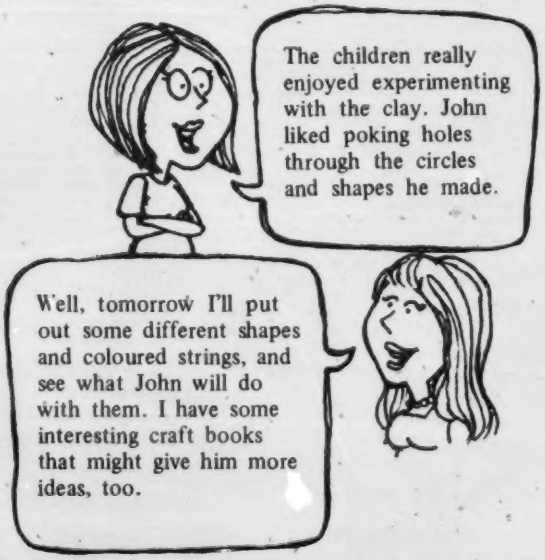
A central theme giving coherence to the parent involvement program in the lower primary Years is illustrated by the State primary school which uses the theme of 'privilege'. The teachers consider themselves privileged to have parents who are interested in taking part in the classroom activities, and parents feel privileged in having a school staff who make them welcome in the classroom. Both parents and teachers work together to protect this privilege, and mutual respect seems to be the outcome. Parents recognise the necessity of avoiding the discussion of children's classroom behaviour outside the classroom and of leaving evaluative comments about children to the professional judgment of the teacher. Teachers become increasingly aware of the parents as people, and take care to avoid placing them in subservient roles or asking them to undertake tasks in which they feel insecure.

Working within this theme, the goals of the parent involvement program incorporate increased adult/child interaction in the classroom and more flexible use of school space. By involving parents, it is possible to have groups of children involved in educational activities on verandahs and outdoors. Parent information, parent education and teacher convenience are all considerations, but these are second level considerations to be fitted in with a program developed to meet the major goals outlined above.

From the moment parents first contact the school they are made aware that the parent involvement program is in operation. At the initial interview they are told that parents are welcome in the school, and that volunteers can become involved in the classroom. Soon after the commencement of each year the infant mistress organises a night meeting to discuss the purposes of the parent program, and what parents might expect to be involved with as volunteers in the classroom. Soon after this, those teachers who intend to take part in the program circularise parents asking for volunteers. Each teacher is responsible for developing her own methods for working with parents in the classroom. The infant mistress, however, has available a wealth of experience for teachers to draw on when deciding on their own program. It has been found that most teachers and parents at this school are happy to operate the program for one session a day, usually 9 a.m. to 10.30 a.m. or 10.45 a.m. to 12.30 p.m. Volunteers, aides and teachers can work together to plan a learning environment for children. This could be called a teaching team, where each adult involved in the program feels she has a worthwhile contribution to make. Of course, overall responsibility for the program lies with the teacher.


Would you like to join us? The children are finding out what happened to the icecube we left out of the fridge last night. Some of the children are very interested in why things melt.
Oh I think Mike is too! He was watching the ice blocks melt in his cordial yesterday.
A B
Yes, we've experimented with melting ice blocks. I think the next step is making ice blocks with them.
Would you be interested in talking with the children about what they see happening?




The children really enjoyed experimenting with the clay. John liked poking holes through the circles and shapes he made.
Well, tomorrow I'll put out some different shapes and coloured strings, and see what John will do with them. I have some interesting craft books that might give him more ideas, too.

'There are a number of children from migrant families and single parent families enrolled at my centre. I find it very successful to have a "roster mum" who takes the responsibility for organising other mothers to come when they can.'

'At my centre most of the mothers do not have full time jobs, so a voluntary roster is very popular. During the time the mother is on roster I like to discuss her child's development and progress with her, and then explain how I am catering for the child. I usually ask the mother for suggestions she may have to help cater for her child. This is kept informal and very much to the point and, I feel, promotes respect between parent and teacher in working together towards a common goal.'

'I usually give any volunteers that I am lucky enough to have working in my classroom a choice about the tasks they undertake. For example, I might say, "Would you like to work with the children or would you prefer to do some odd jobs while you watch?" "Would you like to cover books or cut out some shapes, or would you like to supervise at the clay table?" "Would you like to work in any particular area of the pre-school today?" '

'In my centre, volunteers, aides and teachers work together to plan a learning environment for children. I call it a teaching team where each adult involved in the program feels she has a worthwhile contribution to make. Of course, overall responsibility for the program lies with me.'

Excursions

Excursions are undertaken because the teacher considers that there is educational value in making a study of some part of the environment outside the school grounds. Sometimes children will have already visited the place scheduled for the excursion, for instance a zoo, but on a school excursion they are prepared beforehand for the study of a particular aspect of that environment. A school excursion, then, is not simply entertaining; it is also part of an ongoing educational program.

When parents assist during an excursion they need to be aware of what the teacher expects of the children, and how they can be of help. A discussion with volunteers before the excursion takes place, a note sent home to inform all parents of the reasons for the excursion, a poster giving details of the experiences planned for children, or card material (see page 25) for use by those assisting are all ways in which parents can help contribute to the success of a school excursion.

Getting the most mileage out of your excursion

What to communicate:

- venue
- size of group
- number of adults per child
- selected or volunteer parent help
- whether toddlers may come
- eating out
- name tags
- appropriate clothing
- cost: free, P&C meeting the cost, or family subsidy
- permission
- transport arrangements
- timing
- reason for excursion
- limits on children's behaviour and teacher expectations
- last minute details.

How to communicate:

- prior meetings
- newsletters
- posters
- verbal discussions
- question cards

How you know if it worked:

- cards
- feedback sheets
- newsletters
- kids' conversations.

WE HAD A GOOD TIME AT SCHOOL TODAY
OUR TEACHER TOOK US ON AN EXCURSION. WE WENT OUT AND WE SAW THIS GREAT BIG ZOO.
THERE WERE REAL ANIMALS AND WE SAW THEM! WE STOOD RIGHT THERE AND WE SAW THOSE ANIMALS
DO YOU THINK YOU'LL BE GOING TO SEE ANY MORE ZOOS?
I DOUBT IT. WHEN YOU'VE SEEN ONE ZOO YOU'VE SEEN THEM ALL

Surveys

Do you ever ask parents for their opinions about school practices which involve them?

Here are some comments taken from forms completed by parents of children attending a State primary school. The parents were asked to indicate the types of reporting procedures they favoured. From such a survey the alert teacher can learn a lot about how school practices affect family life.

'As parents are free to discuss their children's progress at any time perhaps the formal oral reporting session at the end of second semester is unnecessary.'

'As a mother I feel that oral reporting is ideal, but fathers (the majority of fathers) often cannot attend these sessions . . . '

'I prefer an oral report as the teacher can often suggest something we can do to strengthen a weakness she or I have found.'

'As I am a sole parent and work full time I find it nearly impossible to be able to attend the school in school hours to see the teachers . . . '

NOTICE TO PARENTS

REPORTING CHILDREN'S PROGRESS AT SCHOOL

The staff of the school has recently been giving a lot of thought to the matter of reporting children's progress during the year. Naturally, we want to use a style of reporting which is not only satisfactory to parents but one which reports adequately on how the child is progressing at school.

At the present time the major stress is on oral reporting. Parents come to school regularly to talk to the teachers about their child's performance. This aspect has been most pleasing. The feedback I have received from both teachers and parents indicates that this type of reporting is very beneficial to all concerned. I would hope therefore that the major part of this matter of reporting will continue to be the oral report.

The teacher up to now has been sending home a profile which gave a visual presentation of the child's general progress. It is this profile which has met with some criticism from both teachers and parents. Many parents claimed they did not understand it. Others maintained it said too little. Both of these complaints are understandable. Consequently we are considering doing away with the profile.

The third aspect is the written report which is issued to parents. As the emphasis was on oral reporting it was considered that the written report was of minor significance. Consequently it was produced at very little cost on the school duplicator and was of very poor quality. It contained a breakdown of school curriculum areas and progress was shown by letters A–E (5 point rating system) or by comments. Once again many parents failed to understand this completely and some problems came about as a result. It is in connection with this part of reporting that we would welcome suggestions and recommendations from parents. We would appreciate your reading this note carefully and completing the attached questionnaire.

Recommendations from the Reports Committee to date are as follows:

1. Parent-Teacher Meetings very early in the year (perhaps March) so that teacher and parents can get to know each other. These meetings would give parents the opportunity to tell the teacher any important details about the child which would help all concerned.
2. Written report at end of first semester (June). Oral reporting only if teacher or parents considered it necessary.
3. Oral report at end of last semester (Dec.).
   Written report at end of last semester (Dec.).
4. In addition all parents are free to visit the school at any time (on appointment) to discuss the progress of their children.

Home visits

This is a very personal and sensitive area of interaction, and teachers need to respond according to the local situation as well as to the child's needs.

'When a child is absent from school due to illness I take a library book to his home after school. This is an ideal opportunity for the parents and me to develop a closer relationship and understanding.'

'When parents are unable to attend initial interviews, I visit them at night to complete the forms. This is very satisfying, as both Mum and Dad are able to contribute.'

'At other times I wait to be invited to children's homes, unless I have a particular concern and would like to meet the child on his terms.'

Discussing children's progress

Some schools have instituted consultations between parents and teachers as an alternative or addition to written reports on the progress of children. Pre-schools do not issue written reports but they frequently arrange for consultations during the year to exchange information about individual children's progress.

The series of films *Parent-Teacher Interviews*, produced by the South Australian Film Corporation and available on loan from the Department of Education film library, indicates the importance of interpersonal relationships in determining the outcomes of consultations between parents and teachers. A variety of different styles of interpersonal relationships is shown in the films. This series is recommended for those who feel insecure about parent-teacher consultations and want to look more deeply at the dynamics of conducting successful consultations. The films do not attempt to depict the ideal situation. Rather, they are intended to promote discussion on parent-teacher interviews. Viewing would be of benefit to both parent and teacher audiences.

Reports on children's progress can be both profitable and enjoyable occasions where teachers and parents can exchange their observations on the child's progress. They can be informal chats at the end of a session, or can be on a more organised basis. For instance, some teachers like to arrange particular times when both parents can attend for individual interviews, if they desire. Some teachers have found discussions at the child's home, in cases where both parents are working, to have been very relaxed, and profitable from both the parent's and teacher's point of view.

Group meetings

Some parent-teacher meetings are called specifically to introduce something to parents. Sessions such as these are likely to be more successful if they take place in a relaxed setting with plenty of opportunity for parents to ask questions.

- Where possible, place chairs in a circle so that all can participate as equals.
- Use guided discussion rather than a lecture to introduce new ideas.
- Use films and slides to introduce new ideas.
- Invite someone with expertise in the area under discussion. The expert should not lecture, but should take part in the discussion.
- Allow parents time to mull over new ideas. Do not press for an early decision.

When attendance at meetings planned for parents and teachers is poor, what is the reason? Some teachers tend to blame parents, suggesting that they are not interested in the school. Parents have been known to grumble that the teachers are not concerned about what parents want. Could it be that there is often a mismatch between the concern of parents and the concerns of teachers, and if so, how can teachers plan meetings that match the concerns of both groups?

Comments from teachers have included:

'I have had success in encouraging parents to attend meetings by showing a genuine willingness to support and help those weighed down with financial, family, and economic problems. Once parents realise that I'm willing to give freely of my time, they reciprocate by attending and supporting school functions. I also feel parents need to have a reason to come to a meeting, and need to know the teacher's policy in regard to younger children attending meetings.'

'I organise an informal morning and afternoon tea for all new parents at the beginning of the year. Each session is short to facilitate communication and to allow children the opportunity to offer the parents some of the "goodies" they've made to eat.'

'At a recent teacher's meeting we all agreed that parents were most interested in 35mm slides and home movie films about their own children and the program activities.'

'To help parents pass on the information they possess about the pre-school and parent group, I organise a social function towards the end of the year, where old and new parents meet. They discuss what they've done during that year as a parent group, and the sorts of activities they have been interested in at the school.'

'So that Dads are able to visit the pre-school, Father's Nights from 5.30 p.m. to 7.30 p.m. are held on a regular basis.'

'Meetings are mostly held at night so that fathers can attend too, if they wish. At the beginning of the year an informal coffee evening, a "getting to know you" meeting, is arranged. Each unit meets separately for an hour or so then the three units combine for supper. At this first meeting the program is discussed and parents contribute their ideas, values and beliefs if they wish. This is done during the time when the units meet separately.

The Annual General Meeting is held at the next meeting. A new committee is elected and plans for the parents group, meeting format and content are made. It is stressed that the parents group is for parents to meet and talk with other parents and teachers rather than for fund raising activities. The meetings are then held once a month and include guest speakers, discussion groups and films. Daytime meetings are sometimes held. Workshops, discussion groups and films for parents have been held in the school hall during session hours.'

This leaflet has been used successfully by teachers to initiate discussion about educational goals.

Parent Group meeting

Aim

To achieve consensus about the goals of the educational, program: consensus, not compromise.

Questions (for leader)

What do you expect your child to have achieved by the end of the year?

How much assistance do you expect the pre-school to give in encouraging your child to reach these expectations?

Method

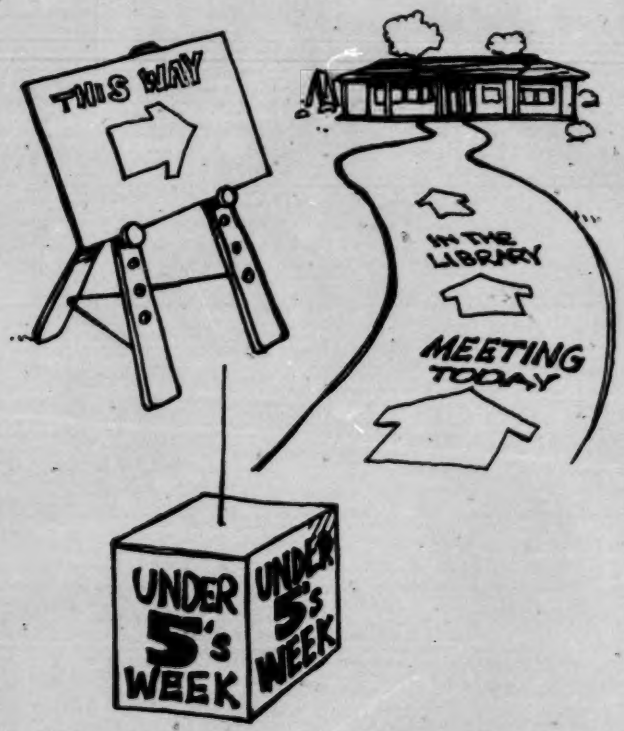
1. A recorder should be appointed. This may be the teacher or a parent. The recorder should note all major issues raised.
2. Where a need for professional support is felt, invite someone such as an advisory teacher or principal of the school to join the meeting.
3. Seat the group in a circle so there is no authority figure to look towards.
4. At the completion of discussion summarise the main points raised and display them on an overhead projector.
5. Discuss and rate the points raised.
6. Use them as a basis for developing school goals.

For a variety of reasons it is not always possible to maintain contact with adults at the face to face level. Some teachers, for instance, can become so anxious about working with parents that their work with children suffers. From the parent's perspective, younger children and employment responsibilities are two common obstacles to maintaining frequent visits to the school.

The concern of maintaining an atmosphere of co-operation with other adults requires that written communications, as well as face to face communications, convey the message that adults are partners working for the educational growth of the child.

Written materials which can foster effective communication between adults are discussed under the following headings:

- posters and displays
- letters and notes
- card material
- handbooks and newsletters

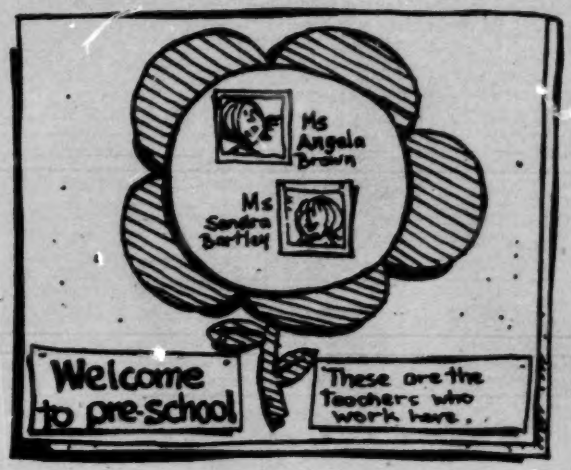


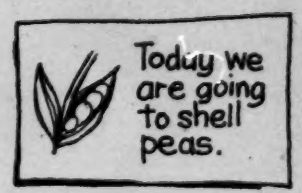
Posters and displays

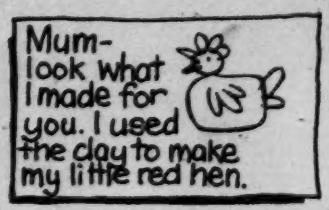
Posters will be most effective if the place where they are displayed moves about from time to time. Just think about the posters in some classrooms. They stay in place from one year to the next. How long is it since you looked at any of them? Everyone tends to stop looking at notice-boards and posters unless they are changed regularly. If posters need to be displayed infrequently, don't use a notice-board. Put up a painting easel, or hang a box from the ceiling with the poster attached to it.

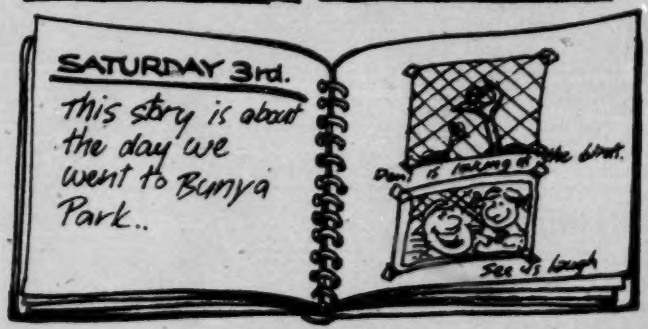
Notice-boards come in all shapes and sizes. Polystyrene pieces, cork tiles glued onto a substantial backing, hessian supported by rods, painted drum lids suspended from a wall (these are good for magnetic signs or taped ones), and revamped caneite shapes are just a few examples.

Notice-board messages need to be short, to the point, topical and relating to the children's interests. A segmented, organised notice-board can make the task of altering the display less time consuming and it can be easily decorated and referred to.









Messages designed for children to decode with an adult's help often provide an interesting way of preparing the child for the day's activities and for keeping parents informed on what is happening at pre-school.

Communications about regular happenings and future events are often committed to writing. One either tires of repeating them verbally, or simply forgets because they happen so often. Posters may help visitors feel a little more at ease with the system and welcome in the centre.

One teacher found it very effective to put up a notice-board which was solely for the use of parents. On this board parents exchanged recipes, advertised coming functions held by social groups to which they belonged and listed items they wanted to sell or exchange. Pamphlets distributed by child care and health organisations were also displayed on this board. Newspaper clippings, articles on child care and development and pamphlets can be displayed easily, and prove relatively toddler-proof, when placed in plastic folders. After interest in them has diminished, they can be filed or stored in a binder for future use.

Sketches of children, photographs of what they're doing, displays of their work and books made at pre-school are ways of identifying, and giving a sense of belonging to, the children who attend the centre. Made readily accessible to parents and visiting adults, they are also effective ways of communicating the value and importance of what children are doing.

WHAT'S ON THIS WEEK

LEARNINGS

La Boite

The afternoon group learnt a few valuable lessons from this, namely
What skiting is.
People have feelings.

LOCAL TALK

Have you seen Mrs. Calavaro's new baby boy?

Michelle was 5 years old yesterday and we are making her a cake.

VISITORS

The school nurse, Sister Heath is coming on Wednesday to look at our eyes.

GATHERINGS & EXCURSIONS

Mother's Meeting Wednesday 11:00 to talk with Sister Heath about child health.

WANTED

1 fish bowl for a promised fish. We'd be most grateful.

Posters can be useful inside the classroom where voluntary aides are interacting with children. They can help to focus attention on the ways of interacting with children that you consider important.

Use open-ended questions:
- to show value for what the child thinks;
- to stimulate listening skills;
- to encourage creative thinking;
- to guide planning and recalling;
- to promote use of oral language.

Ways to ask questions

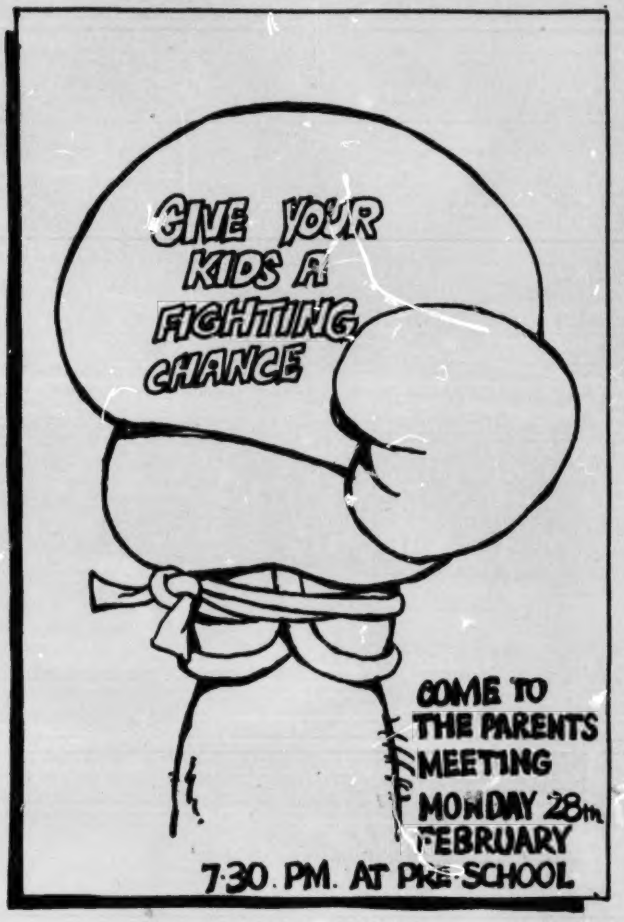
Divergent	Convergent	Evaluative
What can you mix with this colour?	What colour is it?	Which colour have you used most? Why?
What could you use for a tail?	What did you use to make his tail?	Do you like the tail you made?

Each type of question has an important role to play in different situations and at different times, in helping each child develop.

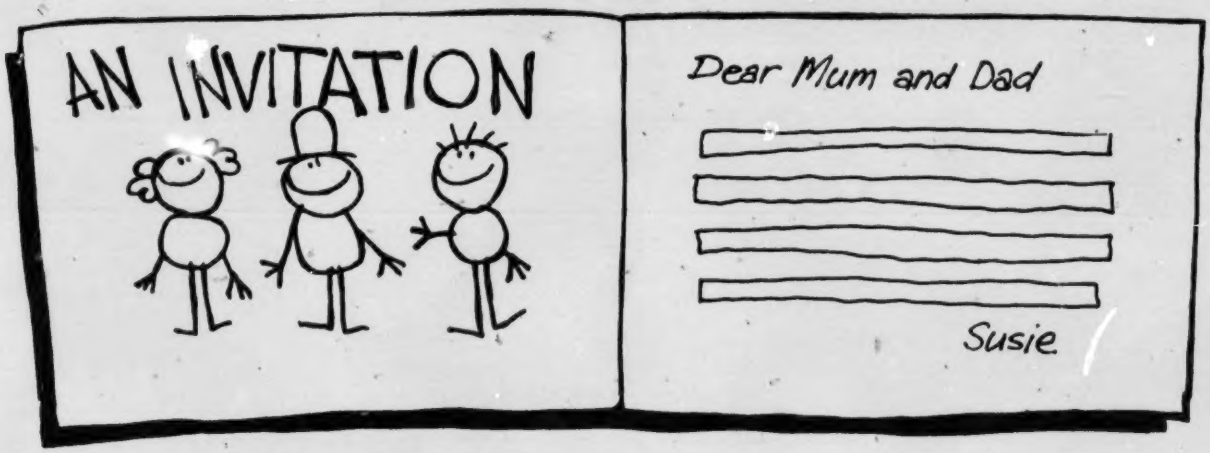
Letters and notes
- why send them?

To get parents to help you? To keep them informed about what is going on? As part of the 'bridge building' program?

The following hints, examples and suggestions are intended for the teacher whose main concern is to gain the co-operation of parents for the benefit of the child. This may involve asking them to help you in a variety of ways. It will certainly involve keeping them informed about what is happening at school, and it will involve writing to them in such a way that they feel partners in what is happening.



A colourfully deocrated manila folder, prepared by the child, is sent home at the beginning of the year at one centre. All 'take aways' the family wishes to keep can be stored together in this special folder.



Dear Parents,

Throughout the school year we will be adding colour words to our vocabularies so that we can describe the things we see. You can help your child learn new colour words, and use those he already knows. Here are some suggestions:

- *As you help your child select clothes for school, talk about the blue dress or the green slacks or the red socks rather than just the dress, slacks or socks. This is a good time to show your child how some colours look more attractive together than others do.*
- *As you take a walk or drive with your child, play guessing games with colour. You can say, 'I spy something yellow (or red or blue or orange),' and let the child continue to guess until he can name the object. When he guesses correctly, let him choose something and name its colour. Then you guess what it is.*
- *Look at colour photographs or magazine pictures and pretend that you and your child are walking into the picture together. What colours do you see as you walk along? Take turns describing the colours of things in the picture.*
- *Look for books that talk about colours in your library. Some of the following may be in your library:*

Is it Blue as a Butterfly? *by Rebecca Kalusky*
The Colour Kittens *by Margaret Wise Brown*
What Colour is Love? *by Joan Walsh Angulund*

- *Look at things through pieces of brightly coloured cellophane or coloured glass.*

Yours faithfully,

.....

Dear Parents,

As part of our social studies program, we are familiarising children with their local area. Your child has already been asked to memorise his or her address and we have made a model of the area with flags representing children's homes.

To bring this model to life we are organising trips around the district. Tomorrow we intend to visit the Fire Station.

Your child will need nothing extra, other than to have his or her 'little lunch' packed separately from 'big lunch'.

We will leave immediately school starts and will walk to and from the Fire Station. Would you please fill in the form below giving your permission for your child to take part.

Yours faithfully,

.....

I hereby give permission for my child .....
to go on the trip to the Fire Station on .....

Signed .....

Dear Parents,

In our Centre, the teacher is primarily responsible for planning the layout within the Centre, the experiences the children have and how adults and children relate to each other. However, everyone in the Centre is working towards the same end – to help each child grow within his capabilities.

The teacher, the aides and the parents and helpers in the Centre are therefore working as a team. Each of us has something to offer. It may be in the role of a good listener for a child. It may be something of interest we have found and brought along. It may be as an extra pair of eyes to observe a child's efforts at solving a problem, and to report it to the teacher. It may be as an extra pair of hands to help a child carry out his plan.

Your help as a member of our teaching team is valued. Thank you for your support.

Yours faithfully,

.....

Dear Parents,

Your children are learning to recognise and use numerals. You can help them enjoy learning the many uses of numerals, and how to write them.

At school, we have discovered that each numeral has a name and that it is written in many ways. We do not expect to find it the same way all the time, but we do write it the same way each time we use it at school.

On this page are examples of the way we write numerals. If you practise writing them in this way you will write the same way that your child does. Keep the examples for your child to use as models when he begins to do his own writing.

Play games and have fun with numerals as your child discovers them everywhere. Some suggestions are:

- *Take a walk or a drive and read the numerals on houses, street signs, license plates and any other places you find.*
- *Find numerals that are alike on a newspaper page, such as a grocery advertisement – the nines, fives, twos and so on.*
- *Find the same numeral in different places at home, such as the clock, television, telephone dial and page numbers in books.*

Yours faithfully,

.....

Dear Parents,

You may have noticed a change in the arrangement of our centre's furniture and materials recently or have listened to your child talking about the "Quiet Area" or the "Carpentry Area".

With the children's help, we have decided on a number of areas within and outside the centre. In each of these areas, certain types of activities happen and particular materials are stored. Just as at home, where cooking utensils are all stored in the kitchen, washing materials are kept in the laundry and tools under the house, groups of materials go together at school.

Learning that hammers, nails and wood belong together in the carpentry area, is part of the process of sorting and classifying. This process is important for young children who are learning to think and solve problems themselves.

The areas in our centre are

- *quiet area*
- *dress-up area*
- *construction area*
- *outdoor area*
- *art area.*

It would help considerably if you could also use these area names when talking over the events of your child's day.

If you would like to talk further about our new room arrangement and the reasons behind it, please ask us.

Yours faithfully,

.....

Dear Parents,

When you visit our centre next, you may notice some differences to what you have observed before. This is because we are operating a new program which, we feel, has some distinct advantages for your children.

This program which we are developing comes under the title of "An Open Framework Program" which may sound puzzling but is based on two firm principles. The first is that the way we talk with the children, the way the pre-school is arranged, the routine we follow and the materials we use and the conclusions to which we come are based on a consistent idea of how children learn and grow. The second principle is that the teachers, parents and children's contribution to what happens in this centre's program should be equally valuable.

Some differences you may notice include

- *the way the centre is arranged and how the children are learning in the different areas within the centre*
- *how the children are learning the routine*
- *the way objects and places for things are labelled.*

As the program progresses, more changes will become evident. If you would like to discuss any aspect of the program with the staff, we would be happy to do so.

Yours faithfully,

.....

Parents may be more confident about volunteering to help in the classroom if they feel that they can use their particular interests and talents to contribute to the program. The form shown below has been used successfully as a basis for developing a mutually satisfying program of parent involvement in a pre-school.

PARENT INTEREST SURVEY

The purpose of this survey is to identify the special interests, talents, backgrounds or resources which you as parents could share in the Sessional Pre-School Program.

You may wish to participate by working with children or with the parent group. Your involvement as a parent enriches the program by adding another dimension to it.

Please indicate interests or skills you have in any of the following areas:

Occupation: typing, carpentry, library, mechanic, science, nursing, teaching, cooking, policeman, fireman, baby care, other. . . . . .

. . . . . .

Artistic and Recreational: painting, wood carving, gardening, sewing, dramatics, pottery, dancing, singing, music, photography, weaving, other.

. . . . . .

. . . . . .

Ethnic background: costumes, food, music, dancing, language, festive traditions, others.

. . . . . .

. . . . . .

Special resources: pictures, slides, from other places and countries. Collections of rocks, pets, artifacts, things of historical interest, other.

. . . . . .

. . . . . .

Special interests and abilities: story-telling, puppetry, card playing, play-acting, other.

. . . . . .

. . . . . .

Any other talent: . . . . . .

. . . . . .

Would you prefer to work with parents or children?

. . . . . .

Please indicate if you know anyone in your community who has special abilities he/she may like to share with us (e.g. Grandparents, neighbours, others). . . . . .

. . . . . .

(Name, address and telephone number)

Name . . . . . Telephone . . . . . .

. . . . . .

Address . . . . . .

. . . . . .

. . . . . .

Please complete and return to your child's teacher.

Card material

If adults are to become involved in school activities, either as observers or as participants, time to communicate with them can become a pressing problem. They cannot know what it is you consider important in your program, however, or how you want them to interact with children unless you communicate this information to them. Card material can help to alleviate this problem of communication.

An observer's guide, for instance, can prompt visitors to look for the kinds of child activity you are trying to stimulate in your classroom. An observer's guide is best typed or attractively printed on card, preferably with a laminated covering to keep it clean and to indicate the importance you attach to this form of communication.

A participant's guide can help parents and others who volunteer to interact with children in the classroom, to know how they can best support the program established by the teacher. Participant's guides can take various forms, one of which is illustrated on the following page. This could take the form of a laminated card and would be of most use to volunteers who visit only occasionally. Sets of small cards which are used successfully by many Queensland teachers would be of benefit to regular volunteers in the classroom, and to teacher aides.

A card to be used by aides and parents assisting with an excursion:

Our visit to the strawberry farm

When examining a strawberry:
What does it feel like?
How does it taste?
Do you like the taste?

On the way there:
Look for:
- freeways
- bridges
- cranes

At the farm:
Why does the farmer use black plastic?
How are we going to carry the strawberries?
How do they grow?

For quiet times:
What are we going to do with the strawberries we've picked?

Observer's guide

Observing in an open framework program

Welcome to our Centre. Our curriculum has been planned as an 'open framework' program in which equal emphasis is given to the child and the teacher in initiating learning. We have organised the Centre to promote growth in

- acting independently,
- social communication,
- problem solving, and
- self expression

by providing children with a variety of challenging and satisfying experiences.

While in the Centre you may wish to assist us by observing and commenting on the program. For this reason the following questions are posed:

1. Can you see opportunities for children to plan for themselves?

2. Are children interacting with other children, with adults, with structured materials, with creative materials? Do you think there is a balance in the interactions?

3. What else do you think should be provided?

4. Are adults supporting the children's own efforts?

5. What do you think children are experiencing in this program? Satisfaction? Mastery? What else?

6. Do you think the experiences are helping children develop educationally?

Participant's guide

If you would like to join in with the children, here are some things you could do.

On arrival

Ask the teacher if she would like you to do anything in particular and give her some indication of what you feel happiest doing.

'I wouldn't like to work with the children just yet but I will do odd jobs for you while I watch.'

'I can catalogue books, tape stories and am terrific at making non-sticky dough.'

'Would you like me to work in any particular area of the pre-school today, and what can I do there?'

Planning with the children

If there is no pre-determined sequence in the children's planning, it can make an enjoyable start to play a game with the children. This may help you identify children whose names you are unsure of.

'I'm going to choose the girl in blue spots first. Next I'm going to choose the person in stripes.'

The teacher will explain the depth at which children are planning. This will help you to know:

- how a child is going to carry out a planned task;
- if he will write down hs plan; or
- if he will draw it and ask you to label it, and so on.

If a child is undecided, perhaps you could say,

'Would you like some more time to think of your plan?' and later go back to that child.

If a child has not decided, when all the others have finished, make a comment such as,

'Let's walk around the pre-school and see what the others are doing and then you might see something you'd like to do.' or

'Was there anything you did yesterday that you'd like to finish today?'

When children finish telling you their plans, ask questions such as these:

'Would you like to go and start that plan now?'

'Just check first to see if there are too many people in that area. What will we do if there are?'

'When I finish planning with the other children, I'll come over and see how you plan is going.'

When you finish planning with the children put your books or notes in a pre-arranged place for easy reference and access. Then go to see those children you planned with, and talk to them about what they are doing.

Recalling or remembering how he carried out his plan, helps a child identify the problems he has encountered, how he attempted to solve them and the sequence of actions he went through. The teacher will tell you if there is a special time during the program to do this with all the children, or if she prefers to do this with individual children as they finish their plan.

During work time

You could use some of the following types of questions to encourage the children to talk about their work:

'That's turned out beautifully. How did you do it?'

'You really did that model well. Where did you start?'

'Peter wants to make a chair like that too. Can you tell him how you made it?'

Sometimes plans do not turn out as well as the child had hoped. In these situations, be positive and supportive, and help the child identify where he went wrong.

'I like the way you built that tower but it does look a bit wonky at the top, doesn't it? Can you think of another way to make a tower so that the top will be steadier?

'Your truck looks great, Mike. Could you have put the wheels on another way so that they'd stay on?'

Sit close to a group who are interacting and when you feel you know what is happening join in as an equal. Comments like:

'Really . . . what happened then?'

'That's very interesting – tell me more.' and

'Oh, what a good idea!'

in the course of conversation help you to merge into the group as a non-critical, non-authoritarian person you may gain an insight into the children's thinking.

Ask a child about the plan he is carrying out. Listen to what he says, and perhaps comment, e.g.

'Would you like me to stay and watch you?'

By all means give him positive verbal support and perhaps some physical help, but don't do it all for him. He has made a plan, and the educational outcomes include that he should see problems that arise and think of ways to solve them himself, and that he should feel pleased at the completion of his task – especially if he has done it all by himself'.

Ask a child who is moving around, perhaps between activities,

'What are you going to do next?'

When the child tells you ask,

'Would you like me to help you?'

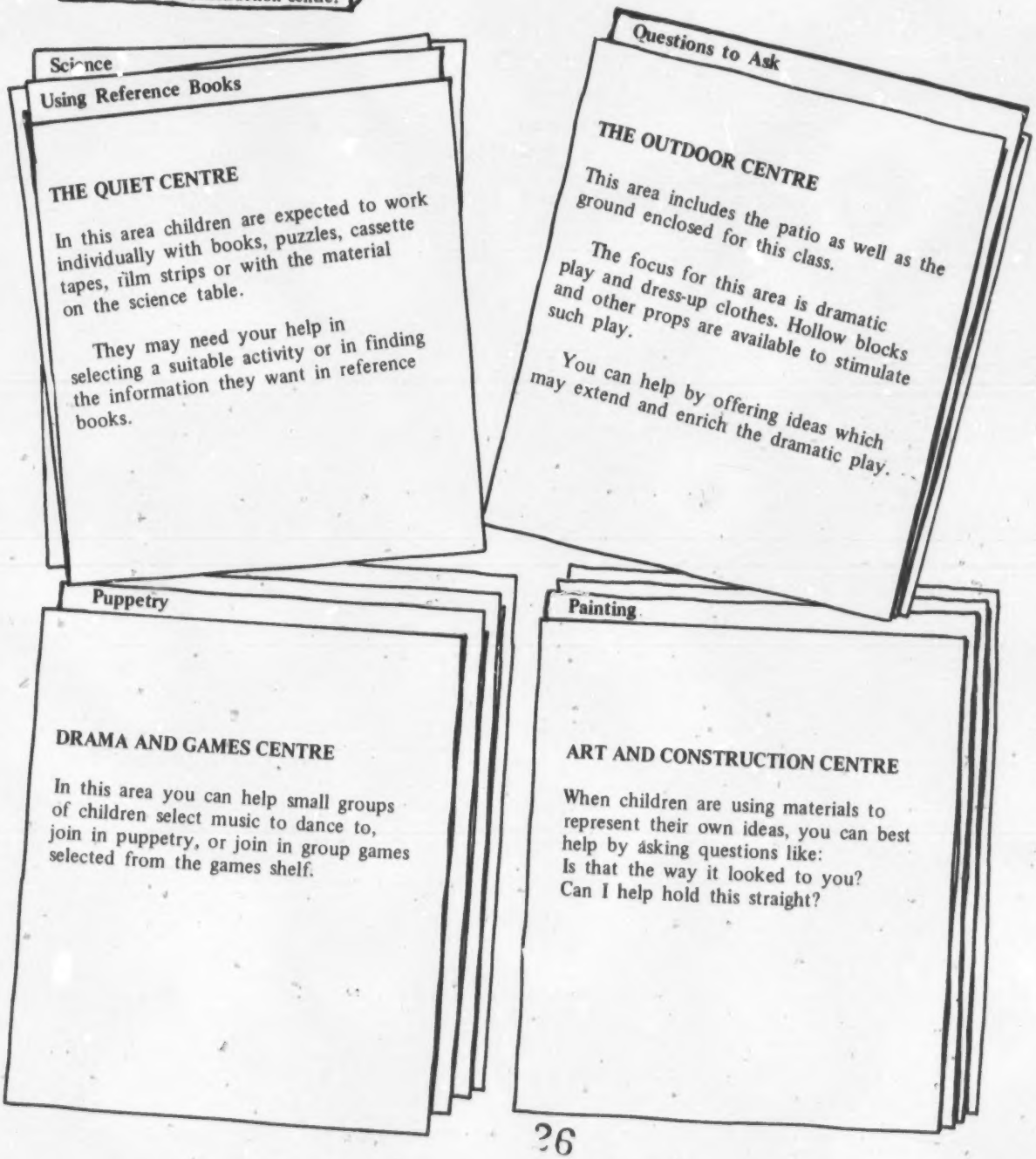
If the child is uncertain, you might suggest,

'Well would you like me to read a story while you decide?'

During small group and large group time

Sit down and join in with the children. It's surprising how quickly your inhibitions will vanish when you watch the children's enjoyment and discoveries. Participate if you can. Before you leave, the teacher may want to discuss the things you have observed, the plans you worked on with the children and any suggestions you may have. This will help her with future program planning and may provide both you and the teacher with an opportunity to communicate more easily about what is happening in the program, and why.

Sets of small cards filed in an easily accessible box can be invaluable when volunteers are assisting in the classroom. These might be most useful if they indicate the style of interaction you would prefer volunteers to use. Lists of open-ended questions that volunteers could use for specified activities (for instance sand play or cooking), is just one form that could be taken by these sets of cards.


Science
Using Reference Books
THE QUIET CENTRE
In this area children are expected to work individually with books, puzzles, cassette tapes, film strips or with the material on the science table.
They may need your help in selecting a suitable activity or in finding the information they want in reference books.
Questions to Ask
THE OUTDOOR CENTRE
This area includes the patio as well as the ground enclosed for this class.
The focus for this area is dramatic play and dress-up clothes. Hollow blocks and other props are available to stimulate such play.
You can help by offering ideas which may extend and enrich the dramatic play.
Puppetry
DRAMA AND GAMES CENTRE
In this area you can help small groups of children select music to dance to, join in puppetry, or join in group games selected from the games shelf.
Painting
ART AND CONSTRUCTION CENTRE
When children are using materials to represent their own ideas, you can best help by asking questions like:
Is that the way it looked to you?
Can I help hold this straight?

Handbooks and newsletters

Many schools and pre-schools produce booklets that serve as an invitation to the school. Even if school policy is not made explicit in this document, the style of the communication usually indicates to parents whether or not the school values continuing contact with them.

In the following example of a handbook for families with children entering Year 1 the authors have used two techniques to help convey the message that both the child and the parents are people to be valued. They have employed the technique of 'talking' to the child in the first section, and then to the parents in the second section. Another technique involves having a child 'talk' to a new child at the school, e.g.

'At school, you will draw and paint. The teacher told my daddy that drawing and painting help children symbolise their everyday world, express their feelings, develop creatively, and co-ordinate eyes and hands. It sounds serious, but drawing and painting are fun.'

Welcome to Snake Gully Pre-School

Dear John,

This is your very own book about school. Your family will read it to you.

All the girls and boys and teachers are glad you are coming to school.

We are your Year 1 teachers and we will be happy to see you, too.

Mrs Shepherd
Mrs Wilson
Miss Odgers

Here are some things we do at school:

- listen to stories;
- sing songs and dance;
- draw and paint and make things;
- learn to write;
- learn about numbers;
- learn to keep rules;
- learn to read; and
- learn to use the library.

Are you clever? Can you:

- dress yourself?
- put on your shoes and socks?
- tie your shoelaces?
- hang up your clothes, and put away your books and toys neatly, without being told? and
- go to the toilet by yourself and wash your hands afterwards?

Can you:

- jump with a rope?
- bounce a large ball?
- use paste and scissors?
- hold and use a pencil?
- draw with crayons? and
- find the right number of things when Mummy tells you?

two spoons

three cups

Do you know:

- your first name and your last name?
- your address?
- how old you are, and when your birthday is?
- how many brothers and sisters you have?
- a nursery rhyme?

Do you know these colours:

- white
- red
- light green
- pink
- yellow
- dark green
- black
- tan
- blue
- orange?

Do you know how to say 'hello' to people like this:

'Good morning, Mrs Wilson'?

Do you smile when you greet people?

Would you like to try to write your name?

An open letter to our new Year 1 parents

Dear Parents,

We would like to welcome you and your child to our school.

Year 1 is the most important year in a child's schooling. Your child's progress will depend, to a large extent, on the past experiences he brings to school, a happy and interested home environment and also your co-operation with his teachers and the school.

No two children are exactly alike, and their progress will certainly not be at the same rate. If you feel concerned about your child's progress, please feel free to talk to his teacher about it.

You can help your child become a better student by:

- helping him to recognise colours;
- reading to him as often as possible;
- insisting that he listens to instructions carefully, and carries out instructions when asked to do so;
- encouraging responsibility for his belongings; and
- praising his efforts and encouraging him at all times.

Here are some guide-lines for you.

Lunch

'Little' lunch and 'big' lunch should be packed separately. May we suggest that 'little' lunch does not contain food which takes a long time to eat. For example, many children find it difficult to eat a whole apple in the ten minute break. No glass containers, please.

Possessions

All clothing and school materials must be labelled with the child's name. It is not possible for teachers to relocate lost belongings that are unlabelled.

Attendance

School regulations require a written excuse to be sent with the child on his return after any period of absence. A short note to the class teacher is all that is required. If a note cannot be sent, a telephone call to the school is sufficient. The times of attendance for Year 1 are 9 a.m. to 2.30 p.m. A note is also required if a child is late for school.

No Year 1 child is permitted to leave the school grounds during school hours without written permission from parents, or unless the parent calls to collect the child after speaking to the class teacher. Children are not encouraged to leave the school grounds to visit the shops at 'big' lunch. At 'little' lunch no child is permitted to do so.

Money

Occasionally your child may need to bring money to school. Please ensure that it is in a clearly marked purse or envelope. Tell your child to hand the money to the class teacher immediately on entering the classroom.

Requisites for 1979

Parents frequently ask what their children will need to bring to school. Most children overcome any reluctance to come to school if their school case contains some materials for school work.

- Two pencils;
- one small plastic bottle of glue, with brush;
- one pair of blunt nosed scissors;
- one packet of crayons;
- three foolscap manila folders;
- one drawstring bag, 30 cm x 30 cm;
- one cushion with a washable cover; and
- a sun hat.

We look forward to meeting you and hope your assiciation with us will be a happy one.

Mrs J. Wilson
Mrs C. Shepherd
Miss D. Odgers
Mrs L. Volker (Teacher Aide)

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